

Caught somewhere in time

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Valorization addendum



Sustainable employability is invented to address important issues regarding extended working lives and peoples' long term abilities to work within the current societal and temporal context. As such, the way in which aspects of this dissertation can be transformed into societal value – or 'valorized' – is quite straightforward and has largely been discussed in previous chapters already. The present addendum discusses some of the ways in which aspects of this dissertation can be, and already have been, implemented to create value for both organizations and their employees. Most notably these include: i) an improved understanding of the currently highly relevant topic of sustainable employability; ii) a better way of monitoring the drivers of employees' long term ability to function at work and in the labor market; iii) a more nuanced picture of how age relates to sustainable employability; iv) foundations for interventions to improve healthcare employees' sustainable employability; and v) on a less formal note, a basis for a dictionary for interdisciplinary communication.

The first way in which the present dissertation may add value is by creating an improved understanding of the topic of sustainable employability. Currently, organizations can be observed to try and contribute to their employees' sustainable employability, but typically start monitoring workload or workers' health, whereas other organization do not know where to start. For example, sustainable employability is frequently approached as if it is synonymous with vitality. Consequently, interventions directed at improving vitality are implemented to stimulate sustainable employability. Examples of such interventions could include providing employees with gym memberships, implementing exercise breaks at work, and putting more healthy food options in the canteen. Alternatively, organizations can be observed to mainly focus on upskilling and lifelong learning as a means to sustain employability. For example, organizations might provide general employability oriented training or training vouchers that could contribute to employees' internal and external labor market attractiveness. Although these initiatives could arguably indeed contribute to sustainable employability, they target single aspects of sustainable employability and typically with a short term focus. As can be inferred from this dissertation's findings and chapters, however, addressing sustainable employability necessitates a more structural and integrative approach. That is, rather than simply addressing health or competence aspects separately, interventions should consider the ability to remain functioning at work and in the labor market as a whole. Moreover, interventions should ideally target structural working conditions (e.g. task variety) or processes (e.g. interpersonal interactions), as it is these components that relate most strongly to sustainable employability (aspects).

In specification of the first way in which this dissertation adds value, organizations aiming to improve sustainable employability of their employees should arguably use a thorough needs-assessment rooted approach. That is, to identify the structural conditions or processes that need to be changed, organizations should use an integral scan to identify bottlenecks and key issues that need to be addressed. Recognizing the relevance of *actual* implementation for valorization, it is worthwhile mentioning that this approach is currently being implemented in the 4Limburg program. Several organizations in the province of Limburg are participating in trajectories consisting of initial stakeholder interviews, a general sustainable employability survey, and in-depth qualitative explorations of identified issues (Rutten, 2018). These trajectories serve to help organizations in optimizing the status-quo regarding sustainable employability. As the foundation of these trajectories partly lies in the present dissertation (e.g., the case study described in the first chapter of this dissertation and the indicators used throughout the dissertation), actual societal impact has already been realized.

A notable example of such a trajectory has been implemented at Maastricht University, where the Maastricht University Sustainable Employability Monitor (UM-SEM) has been developed to identify key issues with regard to sustainable employability, inclusiveness, and work pressure (Aarts, Fleuren, de Grip, and Zijlstra, 2019). The extensive questionnaire used to survey employees of Maastricht University was designed on the basis of the indicators and the conceptual model that were developed as part of this dissertation. Importantly, the approach of the UM-SEM is not only to detect and signal issues, as the UM taskforce for sustainable employability will translate the findings to actual improvements. In order to do so, action and solution-oriented focus groups are used to go from finding, to sense making, to actionable policies and interventions. Moreover, the findings of the UM-SEM have been shared with the entire UM-community, both in the form of reports and several presentations for stakeholders on various levels in the UM (i.e. the board, university council, deans and directors, HR director and staff and employees), providing them with information and directions for improvement. Thereby this extensive approach will constitute a very concrete form of valorization in terms of sustainable employability, work pressure, and inclusivity improvements, but also in terms of aligning UM's HR policy to the expertise available within the university. A good example of how UM could save on high costs of external consultants.

The second form of valorization pertinent to this dissertation lies in the directions it may provide for monitoring sustainable employability or functioning at work in general. That is, the present dissertation provides insights into which indicators of functioning and sustainable employability are relevant. Moreover, recognizing sustainable employability as a longitudinal concept may push organizations to consider functioning on the long – rather than the short – term. The aforementioned projects could constitute practical examples of improved monitoring, with the addition that they should ideally include follow-up measurements on the individual level. As privacy is an obvious concern with such measurements, this notion has not materialized yet. Consequently, to fully valorize the ideas developed in the present dissertation, it may be worthwhile to consider the possibility of developing a longitudinal monitoring tool for sustainable employability to fruition. A particularly fruitful way could lie in developing a service that guarantees data security and privacy while simultaneously offering adequate longitudinal monitoring of sustainable employability and relevant constructs. Organizations would then be able to more effectively monitor employees (although not in ways that allow for data to be traced to individuals) so that interventions that could improve employees' sustainable employment can be designed more adequately.

A third way in which this dissertation's findings can be valorized pertains to improved well-being of certain groups of employees in particular. That is, the fifth chapter of this dissertation shows that sustainable employability is not strongly age related. Consequently, the stereotype that older employees would be less capable of functioning at work could arguably be weakened further. Similarly, as there are only very limited age effects on sustainable employability there is also no indication that particularly younger employees would function less well. Although these ideas do not connect to immediate material value, it may indirectly contribute to well-being and happiness of older employees in the workplace. Moreover, in the second and third chapter, this dissertation explicates the notion that sustainable employability as a concept should be approached in such a way that it generalizes to unemployed individuals. That is, particularly those who are unemployed (or subgroups thereof) could represent an important potential in terms of labor market participation and, thus, potential economic welfare. Relatedly, for individuals belonging to this group extra facilitation of their participation in labor could provide them with more equal opportunities to achieve sustainable employment. Obviously, future research on how this facilitation should actually and most adequately be provided is needed.

Nonetheless, appreciating the social and individual value of inclusiveness, these potential indirect forms of valorization should be recognized as well.

As a fourth form of valorizations, Chapter 6 provides healthcare organizations with relevant pointers on how to improve or safeguard their employees' sustainable employability. That is, several aspects, predominantly in the psychosocial domain of working, have been identified as predictors of (aspects of) sustainable employability. Healthcare organizations could use these employment characteristics as points for intervention. Of course healthcare organizations would do well to verify whether these predictors are particularly relevant to their current organizational context (i.e., if things are going well with regards to a specific predictor there may be less need to intervene). Nonetheless, the predictors as identified in chapter 6 may provide a good starting point that also moves organizations away from considering predominantly vitality alone. This form of valorization may provide a positive contribution to both the welfare of healthcare employees and the organizations employing them.

As the fifth and final form of valorization, this dissertation could constitute a first step in the development of a dictionary for interdisciplinary communication. That is, this dissertation is the fruit of an extensive interdisciplinary project that bundles insights from Occupational Epidemiology, Labor Economics, and Work and Organizational Psychology. The communicative expertise developed through interdisciplinary differences in terms could be materialized in the form as a dictionary. This would be to great benefit of researchers engaging in future interdisciplinary projects. As there is much to be gained from combining insights from multiple disciplines, it is difficult to put a number on the value that can be achieved with a dictionary like this.

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